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To: Mr. H. Bar-On, Washington

Copies to: Ambassador-Minister, Washington; North America Division, The Ministry; Mr. Sh. Argov, New York; Information Department, The Ministry; Deputy Director General, The Ministry

From: Consul, Atlanta (Ze'ev Z. Dober)

SUBJECT: Contacts with the Negro Community

At our last meeting we spoke about Martin Luther King and about expanding our contacts with various circles within the Negro community, and I would like to elaborate somewhat on this subject and continue to develop the line of thought.

Demographic and Political Analysis

First, it is important that we define for ourselves what our specific objectives are vis-à-vis this public, and to place them in proper proportion in relation to the entire scope of our information activity in American public life. The Negroes constitute about 11% of the total population of the United States, and despite the high birth rate they will remain a minority for many years to come. Moreover, many years will yet pass before this racial minority recovers from the economic and educational backwardness which are both the result of discrimination and, at the same time, factors that perpetuate it.

Furthermore: unlike religious or national minorities for whom a shared past or particular spiritual values serve as a special framework and goals for their aspirations, what unites and drives the Negroes are impulses of defense against discrimination and all that this entails. It cannot be foreseen that the Negroes as a public will, in the near future, become a political and economic factor whose weight corresponds to their numerical share of the total population. This is due both to the low average educational and material level, and because the pressures of the domestic reality stand at the top of their scale of concerns, and interest in what is happening in the wider world takes a secondary place in the hierarchy of priorities for existence. This characterization, I believe, also applies to the educated stratum and is evidenced by the small minority volunteering for the Peace Corps for important missions in Africa, etc.

Strategic Considerations

On the other hand, the Negro public is undergoing social-political ferment, and patterns of thought are gradually taking shape that will determine its attitude towards various issues in the future. We must therefore not ignore this large public, and must cultivate contact with all its strata more than ever before. We must remember that our principal task here is preparing the ground for the future. It is not so important how a Negro leader or newspaper expresses itself today on an issue that concerns us (indeed, it is likely that they will not express themselves at all), but it is important what image of Israel will crystallize in the consciousness of the Negroes in the years to come. From this analysis it follows that our efforts must be first and foremost educational and directed mainly towards intellectuals, students, and teachers. Among the latter we may also include the Negro clergy, which plays a central role as both guides and mouthpieces for their flocks.

It appears that even the educated Negroes know very little about Israel, and there are even signs of a certain reserve towards us deriving from various sources, including perhaps the "Judas Iscariot complex," disappointing experiences with local Jews, or a distortion of our image by hostile elements, but mainly, it seems to me, from lack of knowledge.

This is perhaps the place to point out the influence of the struggle of the African peoples for political sovereignty on the conduct of the Negroes' struggle for equal rights in the United States. Israel presents itself in a dual image. Among the Africans we have encouraged the perception that Jews, like Negroes, share a common fate of discrimination and persecution, whereas in our dialogue with the Negroes in the United States a tendency has developed to highlight the positive role that Israel plays in the rehabilitation of the new African states. I do not deny this approach for tactical purposes, but I do not believe it will be a wise and successful strategy if we present ourselves to the Negroes of America specifically through the prism of assistance to underdeveloped countries.

Primary Goals and Strategy

Our primary goal, in my opinion, must be to fill a gap in knowledge and to clarify the eternal relationship between the Jewish people and its land, and to instill in this circle an understanding of the progressive character of the national movement for the social-cultural renewal of the people in Israel. As a by-product of this approach we will also contribute to improving the understanding of the special bond that links Jews—including the Jews of the United States—to that Jewish state, the State of Israel.

Programmatic goals, even when positive, such as Israeli aid to Americans, and all the more so when they are negative—such as opposing a revolution or a regime—must be secondary objectives. After all, we are not seeking to influence U.S. foreign policy through Negro public opinion as such or through its organizations, but rather our aim is to lay a foundation of understanding, sympathy, and appreciation towards us.

Proposed Actions

In the southern United States, Negroes are concentrated in their own separate colleges, something that enables us to have special access to this public without being suspected of "discrimination" on our part, as might arise if we were to approach Negro students in integrated colleges separately and specifically.

It would be desirable to hold a thorough consultation on these issues and to devise a plan for comprehensive activity in the coming years. In the meantime, I propose to begin with the following actions:

1. Introducing a basic library, or at least one fundamental book on the Jewish people and Israel, into the library of every Negro college.

2. Organizing lectures at the Negro colleges. Potential lecturers include members of the staff of our missions, Israeli intellectuals, rabbis who know Israel, and American Negroes who have visited the country and are familiar with our realities.

As you requested, I am enclosing a list including 28 of the most important and largest colleges in our region. The total number of Negro colleges whose presidents I have written to and who receive informational and explanatory material from us comes to 73.

Ze'ev Z. Dober